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Mansfeldová, Zdenka

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Czech Parliamentarism: The Issue of Stability, Professionalization and Accountability

Zdenka Mansfeldová

Zdenka Mansfeldová, PhD, is a head of the Political Sociology department and deputy director at the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague. Her research interest is political sociology, in particular institutionalization and representation of interests, both their political representation (parties, parliament) and non-political interests' mezo-structures, primarily social dialogues.

Abstract

In Ländern auf dem Weg der Transition wird das Parlament zunächst zum Symbol politischer Repräsentation, und das Ziel besteht darin, die legislativen Grundlagen des demokratischen Staates zu schaffen. Dagegen treten in der Phase der Konsolidierung andere Funktionen (wie die der Vermittlung) in den Vordergrund und die Evaluierung der Arbeit der Legislative wird infolge dessen schwieriger. Der Beitrag zeigt, wie sich die Abgeordnetenkammer der Tschechischen Republik im Laufe von eineinhalb Jahrzehnten entwickelte. Die verfügbaren empirischen Daten zeigen, wie neue parlamentarische Eliten hervortraten und sich veränderten und welche Rekrutierungsmuster entstanden. Insbesondere wird die Hypothese geprüft, wonach „politische Amateure" durch „politische Profis" ersetzt worden seien.

I. Introduction

Parliaments of ECE countries have undertaken the process of political modernization by adopting successful Western models and by returning to their pre-war democratic traditions. This resulted in parliaments assuming a dominant role in the process of system consolidation.[1] The virtual monopoly of the parliament in political life, also described as "over-parliamentarization",[2] is now facing the

1 The article presents results of the work sponsored by grant number 1J 004/04-DP1 from Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic.

2 Cf. Attila Ágh/Sándor Kurtán (Ed.), The First Parliament (1990-1994). Hungarian Centre for Democratic Studies, Budapest 1995; Attila Ágh, Parlamentarization as a Region-Specific Way of Democratization in East Central Europe. In: Susanne Kraatz/Silvia von Steinsdorff (Ed.), Parlamente und Systemtransformation im Postsozialistischen Europa, Opladen 2002, p. 43-61.

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dual challenge of globalization and Europeanization.[3] Although the term over-parliamentarization is usually used to describe the beginning of the transformation period when parliaments were "the essential institutional framework for democratization of society as a whole",[4] the typical hyperactivity of this period can be also observed, though in another context, at the turn of the millennium.

The aim of this paper is to show the course of development taken by the Czech Parliament, or more precisely the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, in over one decade of democratic parliamentarianism. The data we have about MPs allows us to identify how new parliamentary elites were formed and changed, and the recruiting patterns that developed. We shall try to validate a hypothesis that there was a shift among MPs, the MPs moving from being "political amateurs" to "professional politicians" and experts. The period under analysis covers five terms of the Czech Parliament, starting with the 1992 elections. The result of the first elections was the formation of a representative board that became the first parliament of the independent Czech Republic. In some cases our analysis covers the period of 1990 to 1992, i.e., the period after the first free elections. The period between 1990 and 1992 was crucial for the creation of democratic institutions and the basic crystallization of the political spectrum. This period is analyzed when there is a need to illustrate the rupture caused by the political change and the period during which new trends were initiated.

This article relies almost exclusively on data from systematic and longitudinal research in the Czech Parliament done during the last 15 years by the Department of Sociology of Politics at the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. The Institute of Sociology conducted five waves of questionnaire surveys between 1993 and 2003, four of which were targeted at MPs and one on both MPs and Senators.

Table 1: Overview of surveys conducted by the Institute of Sociology 1993–2003

Term	1992–1996	1992–1996	1996–1998	1998–2002	2002–2006
Date of research	1993	1996	1998	2000	2003
No. of interviews	136	146	161	179	169
% of the MPs	68,0	73,0	80,5	89,5	84,5

Note: The Chamber of Deputies has 200 members.

3 Cf. Petra Rakušanová, Role of Central European Parliaments in the Process of European Integration, paper prepared for the 19th World Congress of the International Political Science Association (IPSA) in Durban, South Africa, 29. June – 4. July 2003.

4 Ágh, Parlamentarization, p. 43.

1. A Bit of History

On 28. October 1918, the Czechoslovak Republic came into being as a successor state after the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A unicameral Czechoslovak Revolutionary National Assembly was established. The 1920 Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic (adopted on 29. February 1920) was built on the principle of a democratic government where people exercise their power through elected representatives. The new Constitution provided for a bicameral Parliament called the National Assembly, which consisted of two chambers: the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The Chamber of Deputies had 300 MPs elected for six years; the Senate consisted of 150 senators elected for eight years. Elections to both chambers were held according to a proportional representation system. The bicameral system was one of the most controversial issues, and opinions clashed over it.[5] The two-chamber model was later readopted in the new Constitution, passed on 16. December 1992.

Parliament started to transform after the revolutionary events of 17. November 1989. The first change was the so-called co-optation of MPs. MPs of the Federal Assembly and of the Czech and Slovak National Councils were replaced as a result of agreements made at a roundtable between the most important political parties and various civic movements, primarily the Civic Forum. These agreements provided for how many MPs were to represent each of the parties and movements in the legislative bodies. In January 1990 the Constitutional Law on Recall of MPs No. 14/1990 Coll. was adopted. Under this law, MPs could be recalled based on the decision of the central bodies of political parties or the central body of the National Front. The overwhelming majority of MPs resigned before the law was even adopted. According to Reschová,[6] the first round of mass resignations was submitted on 22. December 1989. The process of resignation was almost completed when the law entered into effect, but resignations continued until 30. January 1990. Under this law only 19 MPs were recalled in the Chamber of the People after the bill came into force. In total, almost 50 % of the MPs of the Federal Assembly and 32 % of the MPs of the Czech National Council were replaced by newcomers. From these new representatives, a portion was later elected to the Parliament in the first democratic elections in June 1990. In the FA's Chamber of the People, 20,6 % of the previously co-opted newcomers were elected; in the House of Nations (the portion elected in the Czech Republic), 26,6 % of the previously co-opted newcomers were elected.[7] In the Czech

5 Cf. Eva Broklová, Československá demokracie. Politický systém ČSR 1918–1938 [Czechoslovak democracy. Political System of the CR 1918–1938], Prague 1992, p. 31.

6 Cf. Jana Reschová, Nová politika s novými l´uďmi. Federálne shromaždenie v roku 1990 [New Politics with new People. The Federal Assembly in 1990]. In: Sociologický časopis, 28 (1992) 2, p. 222–236, here p. 222–223.

7 Cf. Reschová, Nová politika, p. 234.

National Council the percentage of these previously co-opted MPs was lower, only 16,0 %.[8]

The reconstructed Parliament continued to work and adopt important laws (e.g. on political parties, on elections etc.) until the first free elections in June 1990. At that point, "new people", very often without any political experience, entered Parliament. Some of them remained in Parliament in subsequent terms, gradually changing from amateurs to professionals. However, it is in the first Parliament elected in the democratic elections of 1990 that we see most of the amateurs. Generally, we agree with John Higley's claim that in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic "there was a more extensive turnover of governmental and parliamentary elites as a result of the initial post-communist elections in 1990. However, most of the former Prague Spring reformers and Velvet Revolution leaders who gained positions in 1990 lost them within the victories of Czech right-of-center parties in the 1992 elections."[9]

The Czech political system is constructed as a parliamentary democracy with two chambers and a cabinet structure. The role of the Parliament in the Czech political system is crucial because it also has a voice in the formation of other political institutions. The Czech Parliament underwent the periods of increased demands on legislative activity, which can be characterized as parliamentary hyperactivity. The first period of increased demands placed on legislative activity came between 1990 and 1993. After the change of the political system in 1990 it was necessary to constitute the democratic legislature and newly conceptualized social legislature, and later, after the dissolution of the Czechoslovak federation the legislature of the newly independent state had to be constituted. The second period of increased demands on legislative activity was the period between 1998 and 2002, when it was necessary to harmonize Czech law with European law in connection with the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union.

The Czech parliament consists of two chambers, the Chamber of Deputies (Poslanecká sněmovna) and the Senate.[10] This paper will not deal with the bicameral system as such, though it is necessary to mention the Senate in view of the role the two chambers play in the legislative process of the Czech Republic. It is not just the role of the two chambers as defined in the Constitutions, but the practical distribution of political powers which often influences the resulting effect of the parliament's legislative activity.

The Senate is part of a division of power understood as a check against the instability of the political system and the quality of bills passed by the Chamber of

8 Cf. Jindřiška Syllová, Česká národní rada v roce 1990. Analýza složení a činností [The Czech National Council in 1990. Analysis of its Composition and Activities]. In: Sociologický časopis, 28 (1992) 2, p. 237–246.

9 John Higley/Judith S. Kullberg/Jan Pakulski, The Persistence of Postcommunist Elites. In: Journal of Democracy, 7 (1996) 2, p. 133–147, here p. 136.

10 The Chamber of Deputies consists of 200 MPs elected in a proportional system for four years, while the Senate has 81 Senators elected in a single seat district majority system for six years with an election of one third of the Senate seats every two years.

Deputies. The difference in the two chambers lies not only in their legislative powers, but also in the power to establish other state bodies, especially the cabinet. The Senate does not have any influence on the establishment and formation of the cabinet. Unlike the Chamber of Deputies, however, it cannot be dissolved. When the Chamber of Deputies is dissolved, the Senate can play an important role in adopting pressing measures. The Senate is the weaker chamber in adopting regular bills, while it is an equal counterpart in adopting constitutional and electoral acts. The differences in the position and powers of the two chambers can be seen in a) electoral terms; b) the electoral system; c) powers and competencies and d) the continuity of the existence of the chamber.

2. The Institutional Framework

The active voting age is 18, and the passive voting age is 21 for the Lower House, the Chamber of Deputies, and 40 for the Upper House, the Senate. The voting is voluntary, as in the majority of European countries. Both political parties and citizens see the elections to the Chamber of Deputies as the most important elections in the Czech Republic. This is one of the reasons why the greatest voter turnout has been for elections to the Chamber of Deputies, ranging from 85,1 % (1992) to 76,3 % (1996), 73,9 % (1998), 58,0 % (2002) and 64,5 % (2006).

The chamber elections took place based on a proportional representation electoral system, and the eight multi-member constituencies duplicated the administrative division of the country. The mechanism and consequences of the electoral system have remained unchanged during the entire period, although minor changes were adopted for the 2002 elections. Between 1992 and 2002, seats were allocated based on the Hagenbach-Bischoff electoral formula. In the 2002 Chamber elections, the number of constituencies increased from 8 to 14, and the seats were distributed based on d'Hondt electoral divisor. Candidates for elections could only be proposed by political parties, political movements or coalitions. To obtain seats, parties had to secure at least 5,0 % of the total vote in the country; coalitions of two at least 7,0 %; coalitions of three, 9,0 %; and coalitions of four or more parties had to secure 11,0 % of the vote. The threshold for coalitions of parties has been increased since the 2002 elections; it rose to 10,0 % for coalitions of two parties, to 15,0 % for coalitions of three parties, and 20,0 % for coalitions of four and more parties. Party lists are restricted, but not strictly, and preferential voting is allowed. The relatively high proportion of preferential votes needed in order to move a candidate up a party list put a limit on the possibility of candidates skipping over all the other candidates on the party list. Although independent candidates may run, they can do so only on candidate lists of political parties; as a result, political parties are the key entities forming the parliamentary elite.

3. Internal Organization: Rules of Procedure

The Constitution stipulates some rules of organization in both parliamentary chambers (for example, the establishment of bodies such as committees and commissions) and rules of voting (for example, the majority principle of voting, and the requirement that one third or more of all MPs and Senators be present for voting). A more detailed treatment of the organization of activities is contained in the Rules of Procedure of both the chambers, which take the nature of a law. At the beginning, the Rules of Procedure of the Chamber of Deputies bore a strong resemblance to those of the communist regime, because until 1995 the Act on the Rules of Procedure of the Czech National Council of 1989 and the Act on MPs adopted in the same year were used. After the change of the regime, both acts were amended, but their structure and content were still not suitable for a competitive democratic order. The Rules of Procedure were prepared for a one-party system, which presupposed control of MPs, by the Secretariat of the Communist Party. Those rules provided an inappropriate arrangement of the legislative process, which presupposed that the MPs would not submit amendments to bills. The Rules of Procedure did not contain any privileges for political parties in the organization of the operation of the Chamber of Deputies, because that privilege was quietly accepted in the communist system and did not need to be spelled out. Provisions for parties were gradually, and with great difficulty, incorporated into these pre-1995 Rules of Procedure.

The new Rules of Procedure adopted in 1995 introduced changes into the organization of activities in the Chamber of Deputies. The role of parliamentary party groups (PPGs) in the Chamber of Deputies was significantly strengthened through the new Rules of Procedure. The chairperson and deputy chairpersons of the Chamber of Deputies and members of committees can be elected, and committees may be established by proposals from parliamentary party groups. Additionally, the minimum number of MPs required to establish a parliamentary party group was increased from five to ten to reduce splits and fragmentation in the existing PPGs. The Rules also stipulated three readings for bill debate. In the system of three readings, committees may debate a bill and prepare amendments only after a bill has been approved in the first reading by the Chamber of Deputies and has been referred to the committees.

II. Professionalization

Within the first decade of democratic development of the Czech Republic, an obvious process of institutionalization and professionalization of the political elite, concentrated particularly in the Parliament of the Czech Republic, was traced. The Czech Republic parliament was the very milieu that mostly influenced both

processes of constituting and establishing the new Czech political elite. In the initial phase of democratization, high fluctuation was being observed among government, parliamentary and top party elites. The existing information enables the formulation of a hypothesis on a movement from a "political amateur" to a "professional politician" and expert. Furthermore, the MPs form a group which, within the parliament, gains cross-cutting political competence and thereby becomes professionalized. The members of this group become professional politicians who establish and, together with newly elected deputies, periodically supplement the new political elite. Which factors might influence the professionalization? There are several important factors, but the most important from our point of view are: a) tenure; b) education; c) growing previous political experience and d) change of composition of professional background. Table 2 demonstrates how the Chamber of Deputies has changed during the time with respect to these factors.

Table 2: Factors of professionalization of the Chamber of Deputies (%)

	1992–1996	1996–1998	1998–2002	2002–2006
Re-election in consecutive term	34,8	36,5	53,5	57,0
First political experience on local level	16,5	23,5	38,2	54,8
First political experience on national, federal level	13,8	46,5	51,7	32,7
University education*	77,0	76,0	74,5	81,0

Note: * No MP has ever had only an elementary education. Source: Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.

1. Re-election as a factor of professionalization

There is a growing tendency toward stability in the Chamber of Deputies with respect to the representation of the same political parties, and this can be seen in the growing number of re-elected MPs with parliamentary experience. Today it is quite rare to see "a new person" enter directly at the highest level of politics. The last opportunity for this was with the Union of Freedom party, which was created as a result of a faction splitting from the ODS in 1998 (please see Appendix A for the names of Czech political parties in English and their Czech abbreviations); the party introduced several MPs without any previous political experience into the Parliament.

Of the MPs elected to the federal and republic (Czech National Council) Parliaments in the 1990 elections, 5,1 % had experience from the previous electoral term. In the 1992 elections, 34,8 % of the MPs were re-elected (to the

Federal Assembly and the Czech National Council). In the 1996 elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic, 36,5 % of the MPs had experience from the previous electoral term. After the 1998 elections, 53,5 % of the MPs in the Chamber of Deputies had experience from the previous electoral term. After the 2002 elections, 57,0 % of the MPs had experience from the previous electoral term, after 2006 election the percentage declined to 54,5 %. Newcomers without any parliamentary experience represented only 45,5 % of MPs, but there are large differences among party families (see Table 3).

Table 3: Newly elected MPs without previous legislative careers (%)*

Party name	1992	1996	1998	2002	2006
KSČM	50,0	36,4	16,7	61,0	7,7
ČSSD	87,5	70,5	31,1	44,3	58,1
ODS	68,2	29,4	61,9	32,8	48,1
ODA	35,7	23,1	–	–	–
SPR-RSČ	100,0	66,7	–	–	–
US/US-DEU	–	–	68,4	50,0	–
KDU-ČSL	66,7	26,3	35,0	28,6	15,4
KDS	60,0	–	–	–	–
LSU	93,8	–	–	–	–
HSD-SMS	61,5	–	–	–	–
SZ	–	–	–	–	83,3
Total	67,5	45,5	43,0	43,0	45,5

Note: * At the beginning of the term. Source: Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.

The growing stability of the lawmaking body is undoubtedly positive. From the perspective of individual political parties, however, this is less clear. Sometimes a party may decide to pursue a "facelift" in an attempt to attract new voters. KSČM managed to do this in the 2002 elections when the party brought new faces to the Parliament (the percentage of newcomers was 16,7 % in 1998 and 61,0 % in 2002), and its electoral gains increased from 11,0 % to 18,5 % in 2002 but declined to 12,8 % in the 2006 election.

To summarize this section, while in 1990 only about 5,0 % of MPs had previous parliamentary experience (federal or national), at the end of the analyzed period this figure was slightly under 60,0 %. Over the decade and a half, the percentage of re-elected MPs has grown from one term to the next establishing rather stable, institutionalized and professionalized basis of parliamentary political elite.

2. Education

The level of attained education is a characteristic that plays a significant role in analyzing recruitment practices. About three quarters of MPs have a university degree. This number is proof of the human potential in political parties where two factors come together. Firstly, there are people who devote themselves to political careers and are successful within the inner hierarchy of political parties, and, secondly, there are voters' preferences that decide which candidates (and with what level of education) should become their representatives in the supreme legislative body. It must be added that scant information is available to voters about the education of the candidates; voters can assess whether a candidate has completed higher education, and the type of education, based only on the academic title, provided it is listed on the candidate list.

In general, the level of education is very high, and most MPs have a university degree: in the Parliament elected in 1992, 77,0 % of MPs had a university education; in 1996, 76,0 %; in 1998, 74,5 %; in 2002, 81,0 %; and in 2006, 79,0 %. In the 1990s the number of MPs without a university degree was slightly higher. These groups of people entered politics only in the first post-revolution period. With respect to MPs of the first democratic parliament, we need to draw attention to the fact that there were many among them who for political reasons had limited access to higher education and supplemented their education through various alternative ways. Nevertheless, no MP has ever had only an elementary education.

A comparison of the educational composition of the Czech Parliament does not yield any dramatic changes. The group of MPs with an education in engineering, natural sciences, and medicine is the largest, ranging from 66,2 % (1992) to 67,3 % (2002). The group of MPs with an education in the humanities, social sciences and economics accounts for more than one fifth. Lawyers form the smallest educational group – between 13,6 % (1992) and 11,1 % (2002).

3. Professional Background

After 1990 we saw considerable changes in the professional composition of the representative body. We can find completely new professional categories, such as entrepreneurs; furthermore, the number of technically-oriented intelligentsia increased significantly (engineers, design engineers, technologists), together with doctors, lawyers and teachers at various educational levels. "The communist parliaments were always conceived as mirrors of society: in fact, there was a deliberate, ideologically-guided programme to have the working class or other groups, for example women, represented according to their respective share in

the population at large."[11] This applies equally to the Czech Parliament. Before their election to the Parliament, MPs worked in various industries. While the structure of communist parliaments was quite varied with respect to professions (with a strong representation of the labor professions), over the course of the fifteen years of the democratic transformation the professional structure in the Czech Parliament changed significantly. In terms of professional experience, the lowest representation is that of blue-collar professions. The first Parliament of 1992–1996 contained the greatest representation of MPs from blue-collar professions (12,5 % in ČSSD, 10,0 % in KDS, and 8,3 % in LB). Later, the number of blue-collar professions declined to zero. One possible explanation could be the limited access to higher education by some MPs elected in the beginning of 1990s who, for "political" reasons, did not have unobstructed access to higher education under the previous regime or who, for reasons of conscience, did not want to pursue a higher education. There may also be those who, despite their high qualifications, could not perform their profession and were forced to accept a blue-collar job. A frequent professional category, especially among those who opposed the regime, was that of a fire tender in a boiler plant. In the second and third terms, representation of blue-collar professions was zero. Upper administrative civil servants became the most frequent professional category, which indicates a circulation of elites among the government, political parties' executives and the Parliament. With respect to the Czech experience, we should mention the movement of people from the Chamber of Deputies to the Senate, and in some cases back from the Senate to the Chamber of Deputies. The reason for this two-way traffic between the chambers may be that the Chamber of Deputies is the one that is primarily responsible for decisions, thus for a political party and for politicians the Chamber of Deputies is crucial.

4. Political Background and the Ambitions of MPs

The Czech Parliament does not provide any evidence to prove that the "old elite may survive and manage to adapt to the new conditions".[12] This is at least the case of the membership in the Parliament before 1989. Nevertheless, we have no data about whether some MPs, especially MPs for the Communist Party, held important positions in the party before 1989. The percentage of MPs of the Czech Parliament who were in the Parliament before 1989 is about 1,0 %, referring particularly to Communist and Social Democratic MPs.

11 Gabriella Ilonszki, Belated Professionalization of Parliamentary Elites: Hungary 1848–1999. In: Heinrich Best/Maurizio Cotta, Parliamentary Representatives in Europe 1848–2000. Legislative Recruitment and careers in Eleven European Countries, Oxford 2001, p. 197–225, here p. 216.

12 Heinrich Best/Maurizio Cotta, Parliamentary Representatives in Europe 1848–2000. Legislative Recruitment and Careers in Eleven European Countries, Oxford 2001, p. 7.

The limited data available does not provide sufficient information about MPs's previous experience in politics. According to the data available, since the beginning parliamentary elites have been mostly new elites:

- in the 1990 elections a total of 22 MPs who had been elected to Parliament in 1986 were re-elected;
- in the 1992 elections to the Czech National Council or the Federal Assembly, a total of nine MPs who had been elected to Parliament in 1986 were re-elected; five of them to the Czech National Council;
- in the 1996 elections, three deputies with parliamentary experience from the non-democratic period were elected;
- in the 1998 elections, four MPs who had been elected to Parliament in 1986 were elected;
- in the 2002 elections only one MP had parliamentary experience from the non-democratic period;
- in 2006 only one MP had parliamentary experience from the non-democratic period.

Recruitment of MPs who entered Parliament after the 1992 elections differed from the first "post-revolutionary" MPs elected in 1990. In the first post-revolution term of 1990–92, the party system and its mechanisms were still immature; MPs did not get to the Parliament through political parties but through movements, without the usual nomination procedures, such as e.g. "the primaries". In the 1992 elections, the situation was quite different. No longer was recruitment "revolutionary", where actors took positions without having any previous experience in politics; on the contrary, it was mostly a standard choice from political parties and lower levels of political power, and this testifies to the maturing of the political system (see Table 4).

Table 4: Representative body where respondents received their experience (%)*

The level of experience	1992–1996	1996–1998	1998–2002	2002–2006
National, federal level	1,5	46,5	51,7	32,7
Republic parliaments	11,5	0,0	–	–
Municipality of the capital city of Prague	1,0	1,5	1,1	3,0
Other regional bodies	1,5	1,0	1,7	1,8
District bodies	8,5	7,0	7,3	7,7
Municipal, local bodies	16,5	23,5	38,2	54,8

Note: * The first experience. Source: Information and Documentation Centre on Central European Parliaments, Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.

In addition to parliamentary experience, experience from elected representative bodies at various levels is also very important for MPs. Data obtained from research studies provides information about the political experience of MPs over a longer period. The data proves that the percentage of those who have no political experience at all decreased, while the percentage of those who obtained their experience after the fall of communist regime increased.

III. Internal Stabilization of the Parliament

The stability of the electoral system contributed to the gradual stabilization of the party system since the 1996 Chamber of Deputies elections. The composition of the Chamber reflected not only the development of the party system but also, in some periods, it increased the dynamism of party system changes as MPs transferred from one parliamentary party group (PPG) to another one. After the 1992 elections, the number of parties represented in Parliament more than doubled in comparison with the previous period, increasing from four to nine. Since the 1996 elections, the number of parties in the Chamber has fallen, and with the exception of the Union of Freedom (US), no new party has appeared in the Chamber of Deputies. The Green Party (SZ), which entered the Parliament after the 2006 election, was present in the 1992–1996 term in the Czech parliament as a part of the Liberal Social Union group.

1. Party Stabilization

Along with the stabilization of the party system and a reduction in the number of political parties in the Chamber of Deputies, parliamentary party groups stabilized in both size and composition. Transfers between parliamentary party groups, dissolution of parliamentary party groups, and creation of new ones were extremely high in the Czech Republic in the first half of the 1990s compared to other Central and Eastern European countries, but there has been a rapid stabilization since the elections in 1996 and 1998.

The period of political party development can be divided according Fiala et al. into the following periods:[13]

1) November 1989–June 1990 (the first democratic elections) – a period of laying the foundations of the system;
2) June 1990–June 1992 – a period of party system creation;

13 Cf. Petr Fiala/Miroslav Mareš/Pavel Pšeja, Vývoj politických stran a jejich systému po listopadu 1989 [Development of Political Parties and Their Systems after November 1989]. In: Jiří Večerník/Petr Matějů (Ed.), Zpráva o vývoji české společnosti [Report on the Development of Czech Society], Prague 1998, p. 269–290.

3) June 1992–June 1996 – a period of system stabilization; with few exceptions, political parties that were to play an important role in the future crystallized in this period;
4) June 1996–today – another period of gradual reduction in the number of competing parties; parties not elected to Parliament have gradually become marginal.

Although the party system has experienced constant change over the last fifteen years, the political spectrum stabilized especially at the level of political representation. Some non-systemic parties became marginal, which can be illustrated with the failure of SPR-RSČ in the 1998 elections. The Communist Party is a special case because, although the party did not experience an internal transformation, it has managed to emerge from its isolation because of the political situation. It has become an active participant in the exercise of power (in the 2002 elections it obtained 18,5 % compared to 11,0 % in 1998, but in 2006 election only 12,8 %).

2. Stabilization within the Chamber of Deputies

Frequent changes in political affiliation in the first half of the 1990s provoked an intense preoccupation with the need to introduce more stability. The cause of "political tourism", as some political analysts came to call this phenomenon, may be seen in the lack of refinement in the political scene, little personal experience of MPs, and insufficient programmatic structuring of political parties. These frequent changes in political affiliation provoked an intense preoccupation with the need to adopt rules restricting and inhibiting transfers between parties and parliamentary party groups. This situation was resolved by the new Rules of Procedure of the Chamber of Deputies adopted in 1995. According to these new Rules, a parliamentary party group may be established by no less than ten MPs, and MPs of the same party cannot create more than one parliamentary party group. The Rules of Procedure introduced formal obstacles against creating parliamentary party groups consisting of MPs who were now members of different political parties than those on whose ticket they ran. Though such a parliamentary party group can be formed, it is not entitled to compensation for its costs related to its parliamentary activities from the funds of the Chamber of Deputies and has no right to be proportionately represented in the bodies of the Chamber. In the following terms we see a rapid decrease in inter-group mobility. There was limited mobility because of the resignation of MPs which combine both – mandate and ministerial position, or because of the death of a deputy. In the 2002–2006 term there was a departure of nine members of the Chamber of Deputies to the European Parliament. They were replaced by substitutes according to the candidate list.

The condition of ten deputies for establishing of parliamentary party groups was changed by Amendment to the Rule of Procedures from 30. November 2006. The reason for the change was the election of six deputies from the Green Party in the 2006 election who did not have the right to establish their own PPG. According to this amendment, deputies elected to the Chamber from independently running parties are entitled to establish their own PPG at the beginning of the term. The minimum number of deputies required is three.

IV. Who do Deputies represent? The Perception of the MPs's Role

In compliance with the traditions of parliamentary democracies, the deputy of the Czech parliament is a representative of all people, not a delegate (agent) of a certain segment of the population. Under the Constitution, the representative can be elected to parliament in a list of candidates of a political party. Thus, he or she is elected as a representative of a political party whose task in modern democracies is to organize and aggregate interests. The term of representation belongs to the basic, but neither simple nor unambiguous, terms of democracy and political science. The conception of the issue of representation lies in the background of such interpretation. The democratic principle of representation is in political practice limited by party discipline, party alliances, parliamentary factions or, increasingly commonly, professional lobbying.

However, the deputy is not responsible to the party for the exercise of his or her function, though the party can apply sanctions in relation to the deputy (expulsion from the parliamentary group, from the party and/or recall from the parliamentary committee). However, such sanctions should not affect the legal position of the deputy as a member of the parliament. In practice, some deputies feel themselves to be bound by their conscience only ("*Trustee*") while others, on the contrary, feel themselves to be bound by their voters ("*Delegate*"). Some deputies feel themselves to be representatives of the political party in the parliament, whereas others oscillate between the above-mentioned types and try to respect the circumstances in their decisions ("*Politico*").[14]

In our empirical survey, we have regularly asked questions pertaining to whom deputies represent and how deputies understand their role. Deputies' responses to these questions highlight the observed ambivalence in the self-reflection about a deputy's role. On the other hand, these responses also somewhat amend the previous findings. There is some noticeable development over time.

14 Cf. Vladimír Klokočka, Ústavní systémy evropských států, Praha: Linde 1996; Maurice Simon/Kevin D. Krause/Zdenka Mansfeldova, The View from the Floor: Deputy Perception of Institutionalization, Professionalization, and Party Development in the Czech Parliament, 1993–1998. Paper presented at the Western Political Science Association Annual Meeting in San José, California, 25. March 2000.

While in the first part of the period under study (until 1998) deputies considered themselves to be representatives of their voters, only a small number (9,0 % in 1996, mostly from the left-wing parties) would respect their voters' differing opinion. Two thirds of deputies (66,0 %) would vote in compliance with their own opinion. Nineteen percent of deputies would use the third opportunity, i.e. submitting to the policy of their party. The second and third opportunities were preferred by right-wing deputies, or deputies of the right-wing government coalition. This group and the previous one include the majority of deputies of coalition parties. The category of party discipline turns out to be stronger in the situation of minority cabinet or governmental crisis. In 1998, before the early elections, 38,0 % of deputies would vote in compliance with the policy of their party, 9,0 % in compliance with the voters' opinion and 50,0 % in compliance with their own opinion.

In the second part of the period under study,[15] the most frequent concepts of the mandate are those of the MP as "representative of all citizens in the electoral district" and "representative of the voters of his/her party." There is a declining tendency to believe that the deputy represents "all citizens" (see Table 5). In the exercise of their mandates, MPs primarily saw themselves as the representatives of the voters of their party. MPs considered political parties to be the dominant actors in the articulation of democracy and the mediation of citizens' interests.

Table 5: Deputies' opinion of whom they represent (%)

	1993	1996	1998	2000	2003
Voters of the party	52,6	50,4	46,9	40,2	32,0
All citizens	42,2	–*	22,8	27,4	25,4
All citizens of the electoral district	–*	46,8	25,9	29,6	39,1
Members of the party	5,2	2,8	4,4	2,6	2,4

Note: * The question was not asked. Source: Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

The above data suggest that half of deputies probably understand the elections as a certain collective agreement between the political party and its voters, on the basis of which the political party is given an opportunity to fulfill election pledges. This conception complies with the traditional intermediary role of political parties as bearers and representatives of certain social interest segments.

15 From 1998 to the present.

V. Conclusion

In 2006, almost 17 years after the regime change, the Czech political scene had problems establishing a government able to gain the confidence on the floor of the Chamber of Deputies. Both elected representatives and democratic procedures seem to be grappling with power. The democratic processes are shaped by personal animosities rather than democratic practices and political culture. This does not offer a very optimistic starting point to summarize on the initial question we aimed to answer in this paper – how the role of representative elite is reflected by parliamentarians.

The five terms of the Parliament of the Czech Republic provide us with an opportunity to examine the development of parliamentary elites and reach some conclusions. During one and a half decades of democratic development in the Czech Republic, an obvious process of institutionalization and professionalization of the political elite, concentrated particularly in the Parliament of the Czech Republic, can be traced. The Czech Parliament has been the milieu that most influenced the processes of constituting and establishing the new Czech political elite. The information we have allows us to confirm the hypothesis about a shift from the "political amateur" to the "professional politician" and expert. This development is related to the process of party system stabilization and consolidation.

The first period of the democratic Parliament in the Czech Republic was mired in unstable party groupings. Transfers between parliamentary party groups, the creation of new groupings, the dissolution of parliamentary party groups and the creation of new ones within one party family were very frequent compared to other Central and Eastern European countries in the first half of the 1990s. The effect of stricter rules governing the functioning of the Parliament and parliamentary party groups, as well as the stabilization of the party system, resulted in reducing such fluctuations.

In our study, we have discovered growing professionalization of the deputies over time. We can state that during the decade and a half of the democratic development, the rather stable, institutionalized and professionalized basis of the parliamentary political elite was established. Simultaneously, we have discovered growing tendency to define the deputies' mandate in relation to the political party as well as electoral district. However, we are unable to establish a direct link between growing professionalization of MPs and the perception of the mandate as there are further intervening factors, such as the party and electoral system, including small governmental majorities, or the legislative overburden in the pre-accession period.